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A PRACTICAL IMPROVEMENT

OF THE

DIVINE COUNSEL AND CONDUCT,

ATTEMPTED IN A

SERMON,

OCCASIONED BY THE DECEASE OF

WILLIAM COWPER Esq;

PREACHED AT OLNEY,

18 MAY 1800;

BY SAMUEL GREATHEED.

WHO IS THERE AMONG YOU THAT FEARETH JEHOVAH ?
LET HIM HEARKEN UNTO THE VOICE OF HIS SERVANT:
THAT WALKETH IN DARKNESS, AND HATH NO LIGHT ?
LET HIM TRUST IN THE NAME OF JEHOVAH;
AND REST HIMSELF ON THE SUPPORT OF HIS GOD.
LOWTH'S ISAIAH L. 10.

PUBLISHED BY GENERAL REQUEST.

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Price One Shilling.

TO

LADY HESKETH,

THE ENDEARED RELATIVE,

THE FRIEND THROUGHOUT LIFE,

AND THE AFFLICTED EXECUTRIX,

OF THE LATE Mr. COWPER;

TO WHOSE CONSOLATION,

AMIDST THE DISTRESSES OF HIS LATER YEARS,

HER ATTENTION, EXERTIONS, AND SACRIFICES,

PRINCIPALLY CONTRIBUTED;

THE FOLLOWING TRIBUTE

OF JUSTICE AND AFFECTION

TO HIS MEMORY,

IS WITH HER PERMISSION INSCRIBED,

AS AN EXPRESSION OF THE SINCEREST RESPECT,

AND THE MOST CORDIAL ESTEEM,

BY HER LADYSHIP'S OBLIGED SERVANT,

THE AUTHOR.

ADVERTISEMENT.

The enſuing diſcourſe was addreſſed to the inhabitants of Olney (without diſtinction of religious perſuaſions) from the pulpit of the Rev. Thomas Hillyard, Paſtor of the Independent Congregation; whoſe place the Author had been engaged, previouſly to the appointment of the Subject, to ſupply at the time when it was preached. Excepting a few obſervations of general import, which have been added, it reſembles as nearly what was then delivered, as the recollection of a diſcourſe ſpoken extempore, and at very ſhort notice, can admit.

The letter annexed, which was ſigned by thirty of the principal people, ſuffices to explain the motives of publication, and affords a pleaſing ſpecimen of the great and general eſtimation in which the late Mr. Cowper was held by his neighbours.

" Rev, Sir,

We the underſigned inhabitants of Olney, who were preſent at the delivery of your diſcourſe on the death of our late worthy and highly eſteemed neighbour Mr. Cowper, beg leave to offer you our beſt thanks for the account you gave of his very ſingular experience: an account which was not only peculiarly intereſting to us (many of whom were perſonally acquainted with him), but to a neighbourhood in general, where he was ſo well known, and univerſally beloved and honoured.

We have moreover to make known our moſt ſerious and earneſt requeſt that you will conſent to the printing of the ſermon; a favour that we flatter ourſelves you will have the goodneſs not to refuſe, from a conſideration of the intereſt which the public at large take in every thing that relates to ſo eminent a Character; but more eſpecially from a view of the important ſervice, which the publication of ſuch a diſcourſe may, under the divine bleſſing, render to the Church of Chriſt.

To the Rev. Samuel Greatheed,
Newport-Pagnel."

SERMON

Isaiah lv. 8, 9.

For my thoughts (are) not your thoughts, neither (are) your ways my ways, ſaith the Lord. *For (as) the heavens are higher than the earth, ſo are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.*

THE eternal Creator and governor of the univerſe vouchſafed to intimate, in theſe words particularly addreſſed to the Jewiſh nation, the vaſt diſproportion, and conſequently the frequent oppoſition, of divine and human counſels. It had pleaſed God to ſelect the family of Abraham to be the depoſitaries of his revealed will, until that fulneſs of time ſhould come, when the glad tidings of Redemption completed by the ſacrifice of the Son of God, ſhould be publiſhed to all nations. The Hebrews had inherited this privilege twelve hundred years, when Iſaiah propheſied to them. If we reflect upon the powerful influence of habit on the judgements of mankind, it will not ſeem ſtrange that this people conſidered the knowledge of the only true God as their excluſive and unalienable property. The principal labour of the prophet Iſaiah was directed to the removal of this abſurd

and baneful prejudice. For this purpoſe, he ſtrongly urges upon their attention the important truth expreſſed in the words that I have read to you; a truth, which, although it may appear ſelf evident, has been lamentably diſregarded by perſons of various deſcriptions in every age of the world.

I wiſh, at this time, to impreſs upon your minds a conſideration of the infinite ſuperiority of the thoughts and ways of God to ours, on occaſion of the deceaſe of our late excellent neighbour and friend Mr. Cowper, who died at Eaſt Dereham in Norfolk, on the 25th day of the preceding month. Extenſively as he is eſteemed and admired on account of his poetical compoſitions, it is in *this* town and neighbourhood, where he ſpent nearly half his life, that he was beſt known, and therefore moſt beloved. Having been honoured with his peculiar friendſhip, and being at this juncture called to preach to you in the abſence of your worthy Paſtor, on *what* ſolemn ſubject can I ſo properly addreſs you, as on an event which is certainly more intereſting to us than to any other worſhipping aſſembly of Chriſtians? You have therefore ſignified your wiſh that I ſhould ſpeak to you on this affecting ſubject; and I have as little doubt of your earneſt attention, as I had of your crowded attendance. May the Father of lights, the giver of every good and perfect gift, direct me how to improve to your everlaſting benefit, this ſingular and important occaſion! I need your warmeſt interceſſion, as well as your moſt extenſive candour, in attempting to diſcuſs a ſubject which baffles my underſtanding while it engages my heart.

To ſee a perſon of moſt amiable manners, of very eminent genius, and of exemplary piety, languiſhing

for

for almoſt half the term of mortal exiſtence in hopeleſs dejection, and often in inſupportable terrors, is not only afflicti e to humanity, but diſheartening and alarming to the ſincere and experienced Chriſtian. We are not, brethren, of thoſe unhappy claſſes of ſociety, who diſpute the being, or the government of an eternal Power. We are not among thoſe who have never received, or who have rejected, the word of God, that unveils eternity, and proclaims ſalvation through the blood of Chriſt to guilty and depraved creatures. We believe not only that in God we live and move and have our being, but alſo that the father of our ſpirits has immediate acceſs to them, and works in us what is pleaſing in His ſight, both to will and to perform. Our dear departed friend poſſeſſed like precious faith. He felt and exemplified its ſanctifying effects. Yet deſtitute of hope, reſpecting this life and that which was to come, he might naturally be thought by others, as he deemed himſelf, of all men the moſt miſerable. How ſhall we in ſuch an inſtance, vindicate the ways of God to man? Shall I conduct you into the labyrinth, without a clue to guide you through it? Or ſhall facts, the moſt intereſting facts, be ſuppreſſed, leſt they ſhould be abuſed?--By no means. Falſehood, alone, needs to ſhun the light. Wiſdom is juſtified of all her children. The Lord's ſingular dealings with our deceaſed friend, could not be unjuſt to him; and they cannot be unprofitable to us, if we humbly and ſeriouſly contemplate them. No more would I ſcruple to declare the whole conduct of God, than his whole counſel, ſo far as I can learn it. But who can find out the Almighty to perfection? Our text forbids the expectation.

May we feel, and may we profit by the truth it holds forth! With this view, I purpoſe--to ſuggeſt ſome remarks upon the infinite difference between God's thoughts and ways, and thoſe of man;--then to apply theſe obſervations to the Lord's dealings with our deceaſed friend;--and to cloſe with ſuch practical inſtructions as we may, and apparently ought to deduce from the ſubject.

Firſt, conſider the infinite difference between the thoughts and ways of God, and thoſe of man. My *thoughts* are not your thoughts, ſaith the Lord; for as the heavens are higher than the earth, ſo are my thoughts than your thoughts. By the heavens, in the language of the old Teſtament, is uſually meant the whole creation of God beyond this terraqueous globe. The vaſt expanſe, containing not only the ſun that enlightens our own and other planets, but innumerable ſuns, on each of which it is probable that ſome planetary ſyſtem depends, affords, when compared with the earth, a magnificent, yet a very imperfect illuſtration of the ſuperiority of God's thoughts to ours. It is the capacity of thought, the faculty of reaſon, that raiſes us, as human beings, to ſome reſemblance of God; but while the moſt exalted of ſpiritual creatures remains at infinite diſtance below his Creator, *we* appear to occupy the loweſt place in rational and immortal exiſtence. What can we conceive of the immenſe difference between the thoughts of our firſt parents before they were degraded by ſin, and the thoughts of Him who formed them from the duſt of the earth! But to what a depth below *their* level, have we, as rational creatures, been plunged by the corruption of our minds! Small is the portion of knowledge reſpecting paſt events that we can obtain

obtain by the moſt indefatigable reſearch; and how ſmall a part of the little knowledge we acquire, can we uſually retain in our memories! Nothing that we ſee around us, or feel within us, is perfectly comprehended by us. We live, and move, we know not how. Incapable of obſerving more than one object at a time, all others exiſt every moment unthought of by us. Futurity in this life, or in the world to come, is wholly impenetrable to our perceptions. On the contrary, He who in human nature was the expreſs image of the inviſible God, knows all things. The paſt, the preſent, and the future, all that ever was, that is, and that ſhall be, at the ſame inſtant, is bare, and laid open, to the mind of God. If we conſider merely our rank in natural being, can it be otherwiſe, than that the judgements and purpoſes we form, ſhould be infinitely beneath thoſe of God? Alas, that when HE condeſcends to make known any thought that emanates from his eternal mind, *we* ſhould preſume to ſit in judgement on the revelation he vouchſafes, nay even to cavil at, oppoſe, and reject his declarations! What have we to do, but humbly, and with reverence, to examine into the evidence of divine revelation; to adore the grace that imparts to us the thoughts of God; make his precepts our invariable rule of conduct, his promiſes our only ground of hope; and firmly to rely upon divine truth, in caſes where its conſiſtency, or accompliſhment, exceeds the ſtandard of our weak and corrupt underſtandings?

The word of divine inſpiration aſſerts that the heart of man is deceitful above all things and deſperately wicked; that his thoughts are only evil, and that continually. It is not therefore ſtrange that

our

our carnal minds receive not the things of the Spirit of God, nor can know them, becauſe they are ſpiritually diſcerned. Till the mind of man is renewed after the image of God in wiſdom and knowledge, it may be ſaid of all, as it was of the enemies of Zion, " They know not the thoughts of the Lord, neither underſtand they his counſel." Happy is it for us, if we have become fools, that we may be wiſe: if, convinced of our folly and guilt, we have received Chriſt, as " of God made unto us wiſdom and righteouſneſs!" Whoſoever truſteth in Him ſhall not be confounded. On this foundation we are ſafe, to however narrow a ſphere our religious perceptions may be confined and however confuſed they may be on ſubjects of diſpute among religious people. Our diſputes, indeed, ſeem, in many reſpects, to ariſe from our forgetfulneſs, that the thoughts of God are not our thoughts, though they are clothed in our words. How inadequate muſt be our liſping and ſtammering accents, to expreſs the eternal mind! If when we would make brute animals underſtand us, we muſt imitate their inſtinctive notes, and often aſſume appearances of irrational anger to inforce their obedience, how much more muſt the Holy Spirit ſtoop, when he ſpeaks after the manner of men! " As the heavens are higher then the earth, ſo are my thoughts than your thoughts, ſaith the Lord."

The infinite ſuperiority of the thoughts of God requires that HIS *ways* ſhould not be *our* ways. The conduct of one man differs from that of another in proportion to the enlargement of his views. But feeble as the human mind is in its beſt eſtate, and blinded as the wiſeſt are by the effects

effects of ſin, our ways remain at infinite diſtance from the ways of God, and are often in direct oppoſition to them. God gave his law to our firſt parents: but they liſtened to the tempter, and were ſeduced into tranſgreſſion. God revealed a deliverer, and required faith in him as the future ſacrifice for ſin: but man neglected, or groſsly perverted the appointed ſacrifices. From time to time, God renewed to individuals the revelation of his commands, his promiſes, and his threatenings: but men were deaf to warnings, and blind to examples; they became wholly corrupted, and were deſtroyed by the Flood. From *one* family God raiſed a nation, to whom he gave written laws, and expreſs promiſes that the Meſſiah ſhould be manifeſted among them: but the conduct of the Jews was an almoſt uninterruped courſe of provocation; and when the Meſſiah came, they rejected and crucified him. The Goſpel, of which *they* proved themſelves ſo unworthy, was then preached to mankind at large: but its preachers were perſecuted; and no ſooner were its doctrines generally admitted, than they were ſhamefully corrupted, and their holy tendency almoſt wholly fruſtrated. The Lord raiſed up inſtruments for the recovery of his revealed word from that oblivion in which it had been involved by ſuperſtition; and bleſſed be God! we ſtill enjoy ſome happy effects of the Reformation. Many run to and fro, and knowledge is increaſed. But alas! the contrariety of the ways of men to thoſe of God cannot be denied, while ſo great a part of the habitable earth remains in heatheniſh idolatry, and ſo much of the reſt in Mahometaniſm, Popery, and Judaiſm; while a great majority of them who have the ſcriptures ſet

forth

forth to them, remain ignorant, abandoned, or merely moral and phariſaical; and while they who hear and profeſs to believe the Goſpel, bring forth fruits ill ſuited to repentance and everlaſting life. In this town, where the truth as it is in Chriſt, has for ſo many years been preached with purity and zeal, to each of the three religious denominations among you; what awful proofs remain, that an infinite difference, a dreadful contraſt, ſubſiſts between the ways of God and the ways of man!

But I truſt that I am addreſſing many, to whom the preaching of the Croſs is the power of God unto ſalvation. Some of you were wicked and unrighteous; but, through the rich and ſovereign grace of God, you have been enabled to forſake your ways and thoughts, to ſeek the Lord while he could be found, and to call upon him while yet near. You know it to be true, that the ways of wiſdom are ways of pleaſantneſs, and, all her paths are peace. So far as you exerciſe faith in the goſpel of Chriſt, you are truly happy, in whatever circumſtances you may be placed. All that you have to lament, is the deficiency of your faith. Your thoughts, and your ways, are, in a meaſure, brought to reſemble thoſe of God: but it is in a very imperfect meaſure; and hence your deſires and expectations often claſh with the purpoſes of God. In ſuch caſes, learn from our text, your duty, and your privilege;---to ſubmit to the infinite wiſdom of God; and to rejoice that He is leading you, though by a way you know not, toward the beſt attainments by the beſt means. You cannot be ſurpriſed that the thoughts of God are unſearchable, and his ways paſt finding out, if you conſider what ignorant and weak creatures we are. It is not that

they

they are imperfect, or inconſiſtent. The whole is doubtleſs regulated by an unerring plan, that muſt, and that ſhall be accompliſhed, in the moſt ſuitable manner. Remember the vaſt inferiority of *your* thoughts and ways to thoſe of God, when you are tempted to ſpeculate upon the mode of the divine ſubſiſtence, upon the firſt occaſion of evil, upon the fall of angels and of men, upon the myſteries included in the work of redemption by our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, and upon the inſcrutable connexion between God's decrees and operations, and our own choice, conduct, and final condition. Complain not that the ſpirit of God has not more fully dwelt upon theſe ſubjects in his written word; when there is already recorded ſo much more than we are able to comprehend. Let the ſame rational ſubmiſſion be exerciſed with reſpect to the works of God, as to his word. While the creation groans and travails together, let us be reſigned. If the clouds that hang over the moſt exalted or extended proſpects on earth, involve *us* in total darkneſs, let us ſtill "truſt in the name of the Lord, and ſtay upon our God." There are caſes in the ſpiritual experience of believers, that perplex the moſt ſkilful caſuiſt; and I apprehend that the wiſeſt miniſter of Chriſt ſeldom aſcends the pulpit, without feeling the difficulty of adapting his inſtructions to the various conditions of his hearers. It pleaſes God to deal peculiarly with ſome individuals, whoſe experience, on account of their perſonal eminence, is likely to become extenſively known, and attentively conſidered. The final iſſue is certainly the beſt poſſible for themſelves; but their unuſual trials are, without doubt, alſo deſigned for the profit of many. This

appears remarkably to be intimated by the ſingular conduct of the Lord toward our excellent neighbour deceaſed. Let us therefore contemplate his experience, both as a demonſtration of the important truth contained in the text, and as a ſource of profitable inſtruction to ourſelves. With this deſign, I proceed,

Secondly, To apply the obſervations that have been made, to the Lord's dealings with our departed friend. Theſe may be conſidered, with regard to his outſet in life;--to the early part of his religious experience;--to his long continuance in ſpiritual diſtreſs;-- and to his late releaſe from affliction and infirmity.

The entrance of our late friend upon the tranſient ſcenes of this life, apparently led to a kind of eminence very different from that to which he attained. Born of amiable and reſpectable parents, of noble affinity, and connected with perſons of great worldly influence, his advancement in temporal affluence and honour ſeemed to demand no extraordinary mental endowments. His opening genius diſcovered, however, a capacity for elegant literature; and he enjoyed the beſt advantages for improvement in ſo pleaſing a purſuit. With uncommon abilities, he poſſeſſed a moſt amiable temper; and he became not only the darling of his relations, but beloved and admired by his aſſociates in education; ſome of whom with inferior proſpects have ſince riſen to diſtinguiſhed reputation, and even to the higheſt profeſſional rank. But the towering hopes that were naturally built on ſo flattering a ground, were undermined at an early period. From childhood, during which our late friend loſt a much loved

parent

parent, his ſpirits were always very tender, and often greatly dejected. His natural diffidence, and depreſſion of mind, were increaſed to a moſt diſtreſſing degree, by the turbulence of his elder comrades at the moſt celebrated public ſchool in the kingdom. And when, at mature age, he was appointed to a lucrative and honourable ſtation in the Law, he ſhrunk with the greateſt terror, from the appearance which it required him to make before the upper houſe of parliament. Several affecting circumſtances concurred to increaſe the agony of his mind, while revolving the conſequences of relinquiſhing the poſt to which he had been nominated; and he wiſhed for madneſs, as the only apparent means by which his perplexity and diſtreſs could be terminated. A deſperation, of which few among mankind can form a ſuitable conception, but which it may be hoped many will regard with tender pity, drove him to attempt ſelf-murder; and the manner of his preſervation in life, or rather of his reſtoration to it, indicated an unuſual interpoſition of the providence of God. His friends no longer perſiſted in urging him to retain his office. It was reſigned; and with it his flattering proſpects vaniſhed, and his connexions with the world diſſolved. A ſtriking inſtance of the inſtability of earthly hopes, and the inſufficiency of human accompliſhments to promote even temporal comfort! Far other expectations had been entertained in the circle to which our late friend was at that time known; but "my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, ſaith the Lord."

At this awful criſis, appears to have commenced Mr. Cowper's ſerious attention to the ways of God.

Having been educated in the knowledge of the holy ſcriptures, and eſtranged from the fool-hardy arrogance which urges unhappy youths to infidelity, he had conſtantly retained a reverence for the word of God. His manners were in general decent and amiable; and the courſe of pleaſure in which he indulged himſelf being cuſtomary with perſons in ſimilar circumſtances, he remained inſenſible of his ſtate as a ſinner in the ſight of God, till he was brought to reflect upon the guilt of that action by which he had nearly plunged himſelf into endleſs perdition. His mind was then, for the firſt time, convinced of the evil of ſin, as a tranſgreſſion of the law of God; and he was terrified by the apprehenſion that his late offence was unpardonable in it's nature. Inſtead of finding relief from reading, every book he opened, of whatever kind, ſeemed to him adapted to increaſe his diſtreſs; which became ſo pungent as to deprive him of his uſual reſt, and to render his broken ſlumbers equally miſerable with his waking hours. While in this ſtate, he was viſited by the late Rev. Martin Madan, who was related to him. By explaining from the ſcriptures the doctrine of original ſin, Mr. Madan convinced him that all mankind were on the ſame level with himſelf before God; the atonement and righteouſneſs of Chriſt were ſet forth to him as the remedy which his caſe required; and the neceſſity of faith in Chriſt, in order to experience the bleſſings of this ſalvation, excited his earneſt deſire for the attainment. His mind derived preſent eaſe from theſe important truths, but ſtill inclined to the ſuppoſition that this faith was in his own power. The following day he again ſunk under the horrors of perdition; and that diſtraction

which

which he had ſought as a refuge from the fear of man, now ſeized him amidſt his terrors of eternal judgement. A vein of ſelf-loathing ran through the whole of his inſanity; and his faculties were ſo completely deranged, that the attempt which he had lately deplored as an unpardonable tranſgreſſion, now appeared to him an indiſpenſable work of piety. He therefore repeated his aſſault upon his own life, under the dreadful deluſion, that it was right to rid the earth of ſuch a ſinner; and that the ſooner it was accompliſhed, his future miſery would be the more tolerable. His purpoſe being again mercifully fruſtrated, he became at length familiar with deſpair, and ſuffered it to be alleviated by converſation with a pious and humane phyſician at St. Albans, under whoſe care he had happily been placed. He began to take ſome pleaſure in ſharing daily the domeſtic worſhip which was laudably practiſed by Dr. Cotton; and he found relief from his deſpair by reading in the ſcriptures, that "God hath ſet forth Chriſt Jeſus to be a propitiation, through faith in his blood, to declare his righteouſneſs for the remiſſion of ſins that are paſt through the forbearance of God." Romans iii. 25. While meditating upon this paſſage, he obtained a clear view of the Goſpel, which was attended with unſpeakable joy. His ſubſequent days were chiefly occupied with praiſe and prayer, and his heart overflowed with love to his crucified Redeemer. A hymn, which he wrote under theſe delightful impreſſions, will beſt deſcribe the comfort that he enjoyed.

"How bleſt thy creature is, O God,
When with a ſingle eye,

He

He views the luſtre of thy word,
The day-ſpring from on high!
Thro' all the ſtorms that veil the skies,
And frown on earthly things,
The Sun of Righteouſneſs he eyes,
With healing in his wings.
Struck by that light, the human heart,
A barren ſoil no more,
Sends the ſweet ſmell of grace abroad,
Where ſerpents lurk'd before.
The ſoul, a dreary province once
Of Satan's dark domain,
Feels a new empire form'd within,
And owns a heav'nly reign.
The glorious orb, whoſe golden beams
The fruitful year controul,
Since firſt, obedient to thy word,
He ſtarted from the goal,
Has cheer'd the nations with the joys
His orient beams impart; —
But, Jeſus! 'tis thy light alone
Can ſhine upon the *heart*."

The firſt tranſports of his joy, which almoſt prevented his neceſſary ſleep, having ſubſided, were followed by a ſweet ſerenity of ſpirit, which he was enabled to retain, notwithſtanding reviving ſtruggles of the corruptions with which ſin has univerſally infected our nature. The comfort he enjoyed in the profitable converſation of his beloved phyſician, induced him to prolong his ſtay at St. Alban's for twelvemonths after his recovery. Having determined upon renouncing his profeſſion of the law, he retired, firſt to Huntingdon, and two or three years afterward to this place, in order to indulge, amidſt rural ſcenes, thoſe religious pleaſures and occupations, which experience had taught him to value far above all that the polite, or the buſy world, could afford. Another of his hymns expreſſes what he felt when entering on his retirement.

" Far from the world, O Lord! I flee,
From ſtrife and tumult far;
From ſcenes where Satan wages ſtill
His moſt ſucceſsful war.
The calm retreat, the ſilent ſhade,
With pray'r and praiſe agree;
And ſeem, by thy ſweet bounty made,
For thoſe who follow thee.
There, if thy Spirit touch the ſoul,
And grace her mean abode,
Oh, with what peace, and joy, and love,
She communes with her God!
There, like the nightingale, ſhe pours
Her ſolitary lays;
Nor aſks a witneſs of her ſong,
Nor thirſts for human praiſe.
Author and guardian of my life,
Sweet ſource of light divine,
And (all harmonious names in one)
My SAVIOUR, thou art mine!
What thanks I owe thee, and what love,
A boundleſs, endleſs ſtore,
Shall echo thro' the realms above
When time ſhall be no more. "

Theſe two effuſions of ſpiritual gratitude and joy, ſeem proper to be recommended to your attention while deſcribing that period of his life in which they were written; although they are well known to moſt of you, being inſerted with ſixty ſix more, of Mr. Cowper's compoſition, among the hymns publiſhed by our venerable friend Mr. Newton, whoſe labours in the Goſpel are, and I truſt ever will be moſt gratefully remembered by you. An obſervation in his preface to Mr. Cowper's poems, on the circumſtances which occaſioned the abode of our deceaſed friend in this town, is too intereſting to *you* to be omitted. " By theſe ſteps," ſays he, "the good hand of God, unknown to me, was providing for me one of the principal bleſſings of my life; a friend

friend and a counſellor, in whoſe company for almoſt ſeven years, though we were ſeldom ſeven ſucceſſive waking hours ſeparated, I always found new pleaſure. A friend, who was not only a comfort to myſelf, but a bleſſing to the affectionate poor people, among whom I then lived, "

Thoſe of you who for thirty years paſt have lived in the fear of God, can teſtify the truth of the remark laſt quoted. Often have I heard deſcribed the amiable condeſcenſion with which our deceaſed friend liſtened to your religious converſe, the ſympathy with which he ſoothed your diſtreſſes, and the wiſdom with which he imparted needful advice. At your ſtated meetings for prayer (would there were ſuch in every pariſh!) you have heard him with benefit and delight, pour forth his heart before God in earneſt interceſſion, with a devotion equally ſimple, ſublime, and fervent, adapted to the unuſual combination of elevated genius, exquiſite ſenſibility, and profound piety, that diſtinguiſhed his mind. It was, I believe, only on ſuch occaſions as theſe, that his conſtitutional diffidence was felt by him as a burden, during this happy portion of his life. I have heard him ſay, that when he expected to take the lead in your united prayers, his mind was greatly agitated for ſome hours preceding. But he obſerved, that his trepidation wholly ſubſided as ſoon as he began to ſpeak in prayer; and that timidity, which he invariably felt at every appearance before his fellow creatures, gave place to an awful yet delightful conciouſneſs of the preſence of his Saviour.

His walk with God in private was conſiſtent with the ſolemnity and fervour of his ſocial engagements. Like the prophet Daniel, and the royal

pſalmiſt

pſalmiſt, he " kneeled three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God," in retirement, beſide the regular practice of domeſtic worſhip. His mind was ſtayed upon God; and for an unuſual courſe of years, it was kept in perfect peace. The corrupt diſpoſitions which have ſo ſtrong a hold upon the human heart, appeared to be peculiarly ſuppreſſed in him; and when in any degree felt, they were lamented and reſiſted by him. His *hymns*, moſtly written during this part of his life, deſcribe both the general tenor of his thoughts and their occaſional wanderings, with a force of expreſſion dictated by the livelineſs of his feelings. While his attainments in the love of God were thus eminent, you, my friends, can teſtify the exemplary love that he practiſed toward his neighbour. To a conduct void of offence toward any individual, and marked with peculiar kindneſs to all who feared God, was added a beneficence fully proportioned to his ability, and exerciſed with the greateſt modeſty and diſcretion.

The conſolation, which, after having endured the ſevereſt diſtreſs, he at that time derived from a life of faith in the Son of God, who loved him and gave himſelf for him, he thus deſcribes, in an affecting allegory.

" I was a ſtricken deer, that left the herd
Long ſince; with many an arrow deep infixt,
My panting ſide was charg'd, when I withdrew
To ſeek a tranquil death in diſtant ſhades.
There was I found by one who had himſelf
Been hurt by th' archers. In his ſide he bore,
And in his hands and feet, the cruel ſcars.
With gentle force ſoliciting the darts,
He drew them forth, and heal'd and bade me live. "

The TASK. B. 3.

This teſtimony to the truth and ſolidity of that peace with God through our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, which is the privilege of them who are juſtified by faith, he publiſhed long after he had loſt all enjoyment of the bleſſing. But who would not have hoped to ſee his path, like that of the ſun, "ſhine more and more unto the perfect day"? --- The degree and the duration of his ſpiritual comforts, had perhaps exceeded the uſual experience of pious people, and ſome ſuſpenſion of them would not have ſeemed ſurpriſing; but who could have expected their total and final extinction? --- Without ſome groſs provocation of the Holy Spirit, ſo dreadful a privation of peace and hope could hardly have been imagined; yet they who had the beſt capacity and advantages for judging in this caſe, remain the moſt ſtrenuous defenders, and warmeſt admirers of his univerſal deportment. Firmly as we are perſuaded, that *mental* happineſs, which far exceeds in value every outward comfort, deſcends from the Father of our ſpirits, we cannot obſerve this ineſtimable bleſſing utterly withdrawn from ſuch a character as that juſt deſcribed, without calling to mind the language of the text; "my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, ſaith the Lord."

Our departed friend conceived ſome preſentiment of this ſad reverſe as it drew near; and during a ſolitary walk in the fields, he compoſed a hymn, which is ſo appropriate to our ſubject, and ſo expreſſive of that faith and hope which he retained as long as he poſſeſſed himſelf, that although it is very familiarly known to you, I cannot forbear to introduce it in this place.

"God

" God moves in a myſterious way,
His wonders to perform ;
He plants his footſteps in the ſea,
And rides upon the ſtorm.
Deep in unfathomable mines
Of never-failing ſkill,
He treaſures up his bright deſigns,
And works his ſov'reign will.
Ye fearful ſaints, freſh courage take,
The clouds ye ſo much dread
Are big with mercy, and ſhall break
In bleſsings on your head.
Judge not the Lord by feeble ſenſe,
But truſt him for his grace ;
Behind a frowning providence
He hides a ſmiling face.
His purpoſes will ripen faſt,
Unfolding ev'ry hour ;
The bud may have a bitter taſte,
But ſweet will be the flow'r.
Blind unbelief is ſure to err,
And ſcan his work in vain ;
God is his own interpreter,
And he will make it plain."

Armed with like faith, let us contemplate the dreary path that our deceaſed neighbour trod ſo long a time. Many have viſited it's gloomy entrance, and ſome have been a tedious while bewildered in it, but none within my knowledge, has traced, as he did, it's whole extent. The ſteps, by which he deſcended to it, were ſudden, and awfully precipitous. The bright, yet ſerene luſtre, which had uſually " marked the road that led him to the Lamb," was ſucceeded by impenetrable darkneſs. After the cleareſt views of the love of God, and the expanſion of heart which he had enjoyed in His ways, his mind became obſcured, confuſed, and diſmayed. He concluded, as too many others have done

under ſo ſenſible a change, and as the pſalmiſt in his infirmity was tempted to do, that " the Lord had caſt him off; that he would be favourable no more; that his mercy was clean gone for ever! " That vivid imagination, which often attained the utmoſt limits of the ſphere of reaſon, did but too eaſily tranſgreſs them; and his ſpirits, no longer ſuſtained upon the wings of faith and hope, ſunk with their weight of natural depreſſion, into the horrible abyſs of abſolute deſpair. In this ſtate, his mind became immovably fixed He cheriſhed an unalterable perſuaſion that the Lord, after having renewed him in holineſs, had doomed him to everlaſting perdition. The doctrines in which he had been eſtabliſhed, directly oppoſed ſuch a concluſion; and he remained ſtill equally convinced of their *general* truth: but he ſuppoſed himſelf to be the only perſon, that ever believed with the heart unto righteouſneſs, and was notwithſtanding excluded from ſalvation. In this ſtate of mind, with a deplorable conſiſtency, he ceaſed not only from attendance upon public and domeſtic worſhip, but likewiſe from every attempt at private prayer; apprehending, that for *him* to implore mercy, would be oppoſing the determinate counſel of God. Amidſt theſe dreadful temptations, ſuch was his unſhaken ſubmiſſion to what he imagined to be the divine pleaſure, that he was accuſtomed to ſay, " if holding up my finger would ſave me from endleſs torments, I would not do it againſt the will of God. " It was only at ſeaſons, when, racked by the immediate expectation of being plunged into everlaſting miſery, his mind became wholly diſtracted, that he ever uttered a rebellious word againſt that God of love, whom his lamentable

deluſion

deluſion transformed into an implacable oppreſſor. His efforts at ſelf-deſtruction were repeatedly renewed; but they were ſtimulated by a ſtrong impreſſion that God had commanded him to perpetrate this act; and he even ſuppoſed that his involuntary failure in the performance had incurred the irrevocable vengeance of the Almighty! To this, and never to any other deficiency of obedience, have I heard him aſcribe his imaginary excluſion from mercy.

Habituated to the fearful expectation of judgement, it became, as at the period formerly deſcribed, by degrees leſs inſupportable. He became acceſſible to a few intimate friends in ſucceſſion, who laboured to divert his thoughts from the dreadful object that engroſſed them, and to excite them to activity on different ſubjects. Thus originated moſt of thoſe poems, which, when publiſhed, charmed and ſurpriſed both the literary and the religious world. The attempt was ſucceſsful in that which intereſted him much more than poetical fame, his partial relief from ſelf-torment. Sometimes his mind was led ſo far from the vortex of diſtreſs, as to indulge in playful eſſays; but theſe intervals were extremely tranſient. In general, his poems are the evident dictates of that reverence for God, that eſteem for the Goſpel, and that benevolence toward fellow creatures, which characteriſed his familiar converſation. Sometimes his thoughts in compoſition glanced upon the ſubject he deſigned to avoid; and nothing can afford a more ſtriking picture of himſelf, than the following lines in his poem on retirement.

"Look where he comes—in this embower'd alcove
Stand cloſe conceal'd, and ſee a ſtatue move:

Lips

Lips buſy, and eyes fix'd, foot falling ſlow,
Arms hanging idly down, hands claſp'd below,
Interpret to the marking eye diſtreſs,
Such as its *ſymptoms* can alone expreſs.
That tongue is ſilent now; that ſilent tongue
Could argue once, could jeſt or join the ſong,
Could give advice, could cenſure or commend,
Or charm the ſorrows of a drooping friend.
Renounc'd alike its office and its ſport,
Its briſker and its graver ſtrains fall ſhort;
Both fail beneath a fever's ſecret ſway,
And, like a ſummer brook, are paſt away.
This is a ſight for pity to peruſe,
Till ſhe reſemble faintly what ſhe views,
Till ſympathy contract a kindred pain,
Pierc'd with the woes that ſhe laments in vain."

The connexion of this paſſage is highly beautiful, but it is too large for quotation. It cloſes with advice to the pitiable ſufferer (which, alas! our deceaſed friend could not himſelf exemplify) to ſeek the favour of God, as the only balm for a wounded ſpirit. At times indeed, after more than twelve years of uninterrupted deſpair, ſome tranſient changes of his mental ſenſations admitted a gleam of hope, of which he immediately availed himſelf for a renewal of intercourſe with God. He prayed in private as before his affliction, and even his ſlumbers were thus delightfully occupied. He has ſpoken of ſuch nights compared with thoſe he uſually endured, as paſſed on a bed of roſe-leaves inſtead of fiery tortures, and as a tranſition from hell to heaven. Theſe lucid intervals were unhappily ſo ſhort, that he never reſumed his attendance on public worſhip. The moſt tolerable days that he ſpent in the cuſtomary ſtate of his mind, he has deſcribed to me, as begun with traces of horror, left by the moſt frightful dreams.

The

The forenoon, being employed in compoſition, became gradually leſs diſtreſſing. Before dinner, he uſually walked two hours; and the air, the rural proſpects, and muſcular exerciſe, contributed to his further relief. If at dinner, and during the afternoon, he had the company of an intimate friend or two, which was frequently the caſe during the laſt ten years that he lived in this neighbourhood, their converſation ſeemed to afford the principal alleviation to his habitual burden. The evening was commonly employed in reading aloud to ſome friend who reſided with him; for ſuch was the care of God over this amiable ſufferer, that he never was left without ſome companion, whoſe heart the Lord diſpoſed to ſacrifice every comfort for his preſervation and relief. But as night approached, his gloom of mind regularly increaſed; and when he went to his bed, it was not to reſt, but to be again harraſſed in ſlumber with the terrifying images of a bewildered fancy, neither reſtrained by the controul of reaſon, nor diverted by external objects.

Of the general condition of his mind, during the laſt ſeven years of his abode in this vicinity, which certainly were the moſt tranquil that he paſſed in the latter part of his life, the beſt judgement may be formed from his own expreſſions, in a poem written toward the cloſe of that interval. It was occaſioned by the unexpected acquiſition of a ſmall portrait of his mother, whom he had loſt more than half a century before, but had never ceaſed to remember with the warmeſt gratitude and the fondeſt affection. Having deſcribed hers and his father's paſſage through this life to a heavenly world, under the figure of a voyage ſpeedily and proſperouſly terminated,

he

he naturally reverts in the ſame metaphorical language, to the diſtreſſing contraſt which his own ſituation and proſpects preſented.

" But me, ſcarce hoping to attain that reſt,
Always from port withheld, always diſtreſs'd—
Me howling winds drive devious, tempeſt-toſs'd,
Sails ript, ſeams op'ning wide, and compaſs loſt;
And day by day, ſome current's thwarting force
Sets me more diſtant from a proſp'rous courſe.
But oh the thought, that thou art ſafe, and he!
That thought is joy, arrive what may to me."

The principal pleaſure that our excellent neighbour appeared to be capable of receiving, was indeed that which he derived from the happineſs of others. Inſtead of being provoked to diſcontent and envy by contraſting their comforts with his own afflictions, there evidently was not a benefit that he knew to be enjoyed by others, which did not afford him ſenſible ſatisfaction, not a ſuffering they endured, that did not add to his pain. To the happineſs of them who were privileged with opportunities of ſhewing their eſteem for him, he was moſt tenderly alive. The advancement of the knowledge of Chriſt in the world at large was always near his heart, and whatever concerned the general welfare of mankind was intereſting to him, ſecluded as he was from the public, and in common from religious ſociety. In like manner from his diſtant retreat, he viewed with painful ſenſations the progreſs of infidelity, and of ſin in every ſhape. His love to God, though unaſſiſted by a hope of divine favour, was invariably manifeſted, by an abhorrence of every thing that he thought diſhonourable to the Moſt-high, and a delight in all that tended to His glory.

His ſympathizing and admiring friends were fondly

fondly cheriſhing a hope, that the diminution of his ſufferings, which was apparent for ſeveral ſucceſſive years, would at length reſult in his reſtoration to ſpiritual peace and joy. Although advanced in years, his health, by means of regular exerciſe and additional ſociety, was not only preſerved, but even ſeemed to improve, notwithſtanding the root of his bitterneſs evidently ſtill remained. Amidſt flattering expectations, the Lord permitted ſome affecting events to revive his diſtreſs in all its force, and to plunge him again into diſtraction and deſperation. He declined all mental or bodily exertion, and rejected all attempts at friendly conſolation; nay he conceived his tendereſt friends to be transformed by the powers of darkneſs into conſpirators againſt his welfare. Expecting every hour to be his laſt out of endleſs torments, nothing ſhort of this horrible proſpect could attract his notice for an inſtant. He refuſed, day after day, his neceſſary food; and imminent danger appeared of his ſpeedy departure out of life, in ſo dreadful a ſtate of mind. But the Lord, who had daſhed the riſing hopes of his friends, now mercifully diſappointed their fears. His period of mortality was extended; and means were unexpectedly afforded for his removal from this neighbourhood to a diſtant ſituation, where he could remain under the continual care of an amiable young kinſman, who, with a tenderneſs beyond the common limits of filial affection, watched over the precious remnant of his life. Much of it elapſed without a probability of his reſtoration to the ſtate from which he had *laſt* fallen. His intellectual powers were ſo much affected by this relapſe, that he was only capable of attending to the moſt trivial

ſubjects, even when willing to have his thoughts diverted from deſpair. Local advantages, the ſolicitous attention of affectionate friends, and the indefatigable aſſiduity of his only remaining companion, were at length rendered ſo far uſeful, that he was enabled to reſume his literary occupations, which were always, when purſued, a conſiderable, though partial alleviation of his diſtreſs.

Here let us pauſe, and look back upon the long, long period, during which he may be ſaid to have "walked in darkneſs, and to have ſeen no light." Is it more aſtoniſhing, that the Lord, whom he had ſo eminently known and loved and ſerved, and whoſe honour he was ſo admirably qualified to promote, ſhould leave him to ſufferings ſo peculiarly ſevere;---or that, through ſuch an extent of time, He ſhould continually preſerve him, though deſtitute of hope and of peace, from natural or violent diſſolution? To me, the moſt ſurpriſing circumſtance is, that without encouragement to ſeek for divine protection and help, he ſhould ſtill have been kept from *ſin*; and that, although he viewed the Lord, in relation to himſelf, only as an implacable judge, he yet retained a holy reverence for his name, a jealous regard for his glory, and an unlimited ſubmiſſion to his will. In every view, while we contemplate this "buſh that burned with fire, and that was not conſumed," we cannot but acknowledge, that "the judgements of God are unſearchable, and his ways paſt finding out."

The ſingularity of the Lord's dealings with our deceaſed neighbour, excited in the minds of all who knew his ſituation, an anxious enquiry, "what will the end of theſe things be?"---It was univerſally

concluded, that ſome important object would be accompliſhed by ſo unuſual a train of ſufferings. Some of his intimate connexions were perſuaded, that he would be fully reſtored to health and comfort of mind, and would become inſtrumental in the Lord's hand, to " bind up the broken hearted," by publicly declaring to others what God had done for his Soul. There were few who did not confidently expect, perhaps none who did not earneſtly hope, that the tedious night of ſorrow would terminate previous to his departure from this life, and that his latter end would be peace and joy. All indeed, I believe without exception, who well knew this excellent man, were ſo fully convinced of his uprightneſs of heart before God, that in whatever ſtate of mind he might cloſe his eyes on earthly ſcenes, they could not doubt of his entrance into glory, through the atonement of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, which had been the only ground of his hope, and was ſtill all his deſire. Yet they could not, without ſome degree of anxiety, look forward to the laſt ſcene of life, which his advancing age evinced to be at hand. This iſſue of his whole warfare has but recently been decided; and the manner of it has not as yet publicly tranſpired. Comparing the end with the various hopes or fears that were entertained concerning it, we ſhall have additional occaſion to recollect, that " the Lord's ways are not our ways, neither are our thoughts his thoughts."

During the laſt year, or two, of Mr. Cowper's life, his health, and his ſtate of mind, appeared to be as much reſtored, as for an equal time at any period during his long afflictions. Toward the cloſe of the paſt winter, he was however attacked

by a bodily diſorder, which brought on a rapid decay. His young friend and relative, convinced that he would ſhortly exchange a world of infirmity and ſorrow for a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, repeatedly endeavoured to cheer him with the proſpect, and to aſſure him of the happineſs that awaited him. Still he refuſed to be comforted. "Oh ſpare me! ſpare me! You know, you *know* it to be falſe"---was his only reply; with the ſame invincible deſpair, to which he had ſo long been a prey. Early on the twenty-fifth of April, he ſunk into a ſtate of apparent inſenſibility, which might have been miſtaken for a tranquil ſlumber, but that his eyes remained half open. His breath was regular, though feeble; and his countenance, and animal frame were perfectly ſerene. In this ſtate he continued for twelve hours; and then expired, without heaving his breath.

In reviewing ſuch a diſplay of human affliction as the life of our admired friend preſents to us, let us not cheriſh that ſtupid inſenſibility which modern ſcepticiſm has but too ſucceſsfully inculcated. "Remember them who have ſuffered adverſity, as being yourſelves alſo in the body." To them who believe that God was manifeſt in the fleſh, by the Word, who was God, being made fleſh, the condition of Humanity appears highly important, and becomes peculiarly intereſting. The Lord Jeſus Chriſt, our glorious Highprieſt, is "touched with the feeling of our infirmities. He was in all points tempted as we are, and afflicted in all our afflictions. The God and Father of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, the Father of mercies and God of all conſolation, doth not willingly afflict, nor grieve the children

children of men. As a father pitieth his children, the Lord pitieth all who fear him." Even a mother's compaſſionate remembrance of the infant at her breaſt, is repreſented in the holy ſcriptures, as leſs certain than the Lord's remembrance of his people. Hence we may reaſonably infer, that the grievous and wearisome afflictions endured by our deceaſed friend, would not have been permitted, but for ſome important, neceſſary and gracious purpoſe of God. The Lord's ways and thoughts are ſuperior to thoſe of man, as they are directed to the general good, while ours are biaſſed by ſelfiſh and partial views: but it is equally certain, that the Judge of the whole earth will act juſtly toward every individual, and will not in any inſtance, like mankind, do evil that good may come. The Lord's conduct was doubtleſs juſt, and ultimately gracious, toward our afflicted neighbour; but when we conſider it's ſingularity, and the excellence and celebrity of the perſon thus dealt with, we may alſo properly conclude, that by this diſplay of his ſovereignty, the Lord deſigned to impart to us ſome needful inſtruction, or to impreſs more powerfully upon our minds ſome important truths, of which although not ignorant, we have been too forgetful. Let us therefore, ſeeking for wiſdom from above, proceed

Thirdly, To contemplate the very remarkable dealings of God with our departed friend, as a ſource of profitable inſtruction to ourſelves. Without pretending to fathom the depth of the riches of the wiſdom of God in this uncommon diſpenſation, or to exhauſt a ſubject of which we ſhall probably know more hereafter, we may certainly derive ſeveral very

very uſeful leſſons, both to correct our judgement, and to improve our conduct, from the ſolemn topic which has been diſcuſſed. That the Lord did *not* raiſe up Mr. Cowper from a ſtate of infirmity and affliction, to declare, by his lips or by his pen, the dealings of God with his Soul, may perhaps be accounted for, if we reflect, that being dead he ſpeaks more than he could have done while living. The iſſue, which would then have remained uncertain, is now decided; and we may ſpeak more confidently than he could himſelf have done. Having learned, from what is already ſtated, to *ſubmit* our ways and thoughts to thoſe of God, let us now, under his bleſſing, endeavour to bring our own judgement and conduct to a better *reſemblance* of them.

1ſt. We may learn in various reſpects to form *our judgements* more ſuitably to the *thoughts of God.* There is perhaps nothing in which the judgement of God and that of man appear to be more oppoſite, than in what regards the demerit and dreadful conſequences of SIN. The mind of man revolts againſt the calamities which exiſt in the world as conſequences of original tranſgreſſion, againſt the doom of everlaſting miſery pronounced upon every impenitent offender, and againſt the neceſſity of ſuch a ſacrifice as that of our Saviour Jeſus Chriſt, the Lord of Glory, in order to the juſtification of ſinners believing in him. Mankind, forgetful of the indiſputable authority, the unerring wiſdom and unſpeakable goodneſs of God, will not admit the evil of tranſgreſſing his commands to be ſo great, as juſtly to incur ſuch puniſhments, or indiſpenſably to require ſuch a propitiation. They regard as

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deſirable, whatever may gratify their natural inclinations, promote their preſent eaſe, or advance their worldly intereſts, whether it be allowed or prohibited by the law of God. But the Almighty has added to his commands reſpecting our outward conduct, that ſearching precept, Thou ſhall not covet! And he has revealed his wrath againſt all kinds and degrees of impiety and injuſtice among men; requiring on pain of everlaſting perdition, that we ſhould love the Lord our God with all our heart, and our neighbours as ourſelves. Hence the Scripture concludes all mankind under Sin, and therefore abſolutely in need of Salvation. It has always been a common prejudice among men, to ſuppoſe that individuals upon whom ſignal calamities have been inflicted, muſt of courſe have been ſignal tranſgreſſors; as if thoſe offences againſt God's law which are either leſs aggravated, or more cuſtomary, were too trivial to juſtify any conſiderable degree of puniſhment even in this world. Thus Job's companions regarded his peculiar ſufferings as a proof, that, however fair and eminent his outward character had been, he muſt in ſecret have been a grievous offender againſt God. But the Lord ſeverely reproved them, and juſtified his ſervant Job from their uncharitable cenſures. Our Lord Jeſus fully determines this point, on occaſion of the remarkable calamities in which ſome inhabitants of Jeruſalem, and ſome Galileans who came thither to offer ſacrifices, were involved, at the time of his miniſtry. "Suppoſe ye," ſaid he to his diſciples, "that theſe Galileans were ſinners above all the Galileans, becauſe they ſuffered ſuch things? I tell you, nay; but except ye repent, ye ſhall all likewiſe periſh. Or

thoſe eighteen upon whom the tower of Siloam fell, and ſlew them, think ye that they were ſinners above all men that dwelt at Jeruſalem? I tell you, nay; but, except ye repent, ye ſhall all likewiſe periſh." So if any of you think, that becauſe Mr. Cowper was ſo eminent a ſufferer, he muſt have been a ſinner above others; I tell you, no; but except *you* repent, you will all periſh. I have good ground to believe, that *before* our deceaſed friend was brought to a knowledge of the Goſpel, his conduct, inſtead of being notoriouſly wicked, was generally inoffenſive and amiable. I have ſtill more reaſon to be convinced, that *ſince* he profeſſed the knowledge and love of Chriſt, he never allowed himſelf in the practice of any thing that he apprehended to be contrary to the will of God. But he was, as all are, guilty before God. He felt, and confeſſed himſelf to be a ſinner. He humbled himſelf as ſuch under the hand of God, and amidſt his ſevere afflictions could ſay, "I was dumb, I opened not my mouth, becauſe thou didſt it." Never perhaps was there in any known inſtance, except that of our Lord Jeſus himſelf, a more ſtriking example of ſubmiſſion than he afforded. But if ſin, where it had evidently ſo ſmall a comparative influence, was juſtly attended with ſuch a weight of woe, how heinous muſt it be univerſally in the ſight of God, how malignant in its general conſequences! If judgement thus began with *him*, "what ſhall the end be of them that obey not the goſpel of God? And if the righteous ſcarcely be ſaved, where ſhall the ſinner and the ungodly appear?"

A ſuitable improvement of this ſubject may lead us to a better conformity with the thoughts of God,

in forming a comparative eſtimate of TIME and ETERNITY, of the preſent life and of that which is to come. " If in this life only," ſaid the apoſtle Paul, with a view to the diſtreſſes which he and other diſciples of Jeſus endured, " if in this life only we had hope, we ſhould be of all men the moſt miſerable." With what anguiſh of heart did our deceaſed friend write on his window ſhutter, the day when he quitted this neighbourhood,

" Me miſerable! How could I eſcape
Infinite wrath, and infinite deſpair,
When death, earth, heaven, and all, conſign'd to ruin,
Whoſe friend *was* God, but God ſwore not to aid me! "

The nature, the extremity, the duration of his ſufferings, cannot be ſeriouſly revolved, without awe and terror. The only effectual conſolation to us, is that, which in his experience, I doubt not, has already far exceeded the length and breadth, the height and depth of his ſorrows --- his entrance into the joy of our Lord. What is all that he endured for almoſt thirty years, what is all that can be endured throughout the utmoſt extent of mortality, compared with that " Reſt which remaineth for the people of God "? No affliction for the preſent is joyous; our natures even innocently recoil from ſuffering, as the humanity of Jeſus did. This life, in itſelf, is of no ſmall importance to ſuch beings as we are; and when lingered out in pain and diſtreſs, it is a ſevere trial to our faith. But we ſee by the common afflictions of believers, and ſtill more by ſuch an example as this before us, how ſmall an account the Eternal makes of temporal ſufferings, compared with everlaſting bleſſedneſs and glory. Let *his* thoughts become our thoughts. The age of Methuſelah, if

ſpent in unintermitted miſery on earth, would be compenſated a thouſand, and ten thouſand times ten thouſand, in heaven; yet without the ſmalleſt approach to a termination of its enjoyments. On the other hand, my friends, conſider what is the utmoſt extent of worldly pleaſures, riches or grandeur, that can be poſſeſſed for this ſhort life, compared with the worm that never dieth, the fire that is never quenched, the ſmoke of whoſe torment aſcendeth for ever? Oh, flee from the wrath to come, and lay hold for hope on the refuge ſet before you in the Goſpel! It brings life and immortality to light, by the revelation of Jeſus Chriſt, as the author of eternal ſalvation to all who put their truſt in him. Chuſe as Moſes did, "rather to ſuffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleaſures of ſin for a ſeaſon; eſteeming the reproach of Chriſt" above the greateſt earthly riches, and having a juſt "reſpect to the recompenſe of the reward."

That *our Conduct* alſo, may be better conformed to the *ways of God*, let us derive ſome important *practical* leſſons from the ſubject which has engaged our attention.

HUMILITY, CONTENTMENT, and THANKFULNESS, which though diſtinct ſeem to be inſeparable, are diſpoſitions forcibly inculcated by the conſideration of our departed friend's experience. How few among mankind have ever attained to the ſame eminence and excellence as he did; yet with all his natural, his acquired, his moral and ſpiritual endowments, how hopeleſs, how comfortleſs was his condition! Lord! what is man? At his beſt eſtate altogether vanity. Chriſtians! have you ſpiritual comfort, have you diſtinguiſhed talents, have you an unblemiſhed

blemiſhed and honourable character? Remember Cowper, and "put your hands upon your mouths, and your mouths in the duſt before God." "Let no fleſh glory in His preſence; but, as it is written, he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord." Beware of placing the ſlighteſt reliance upon your paſt or preſent attainments, or of cheriſhing a ſpark of pride on the account. In an inſtant, the Lord can turn your boaſting into ſhame; and he will do ſo, rather than ſuffer His glory, or your ſalvation, to be impeded. It is "He that worketh in you to will and to perform, therefore work out your own ſalvation with fear and trembling." Never forget that your acceptance depends only upon the ſacrifice and interceſſion of Chriſt, and your ſpiritual preſervation and growth in grace, upon the conſtant operation of the Holy Spirit. So far as theſe grounds of dependance are rejected or ſlighted, your ways become oppoſed to thoſe of God, and therefore cannot proſper. With humiliation before God, *Contentment* under his diſpenſations is cloſely connected. You forget the evil of ſin, or you have never been convinced of it, if you are murmuring againſt God, whatever ſituation you are in. If tempted to repine at poverty, bad health, unkindneſs or injuries from others, and the lowneſs or inſtability of your ſpiritual comfort; recollect the ſtate of our deceaſed neighbour, and compare your conduct and your trials with his. Would any of you exchange *your* affiictions for what *he* ſuffered? Reluctant as every one is to bear his own peculiar croſs, and prone to wiſh for that of another in it's ſtead, I hardly think that any of you, after the detail that has been given of Mr. Cowper's miſeries, will preſume

ſume to ſay that your trials are to be compared with his. If they were, you would not have been preſent on this occaſion. He never dared to enter a place of worſhip. When invited to do ſo, he has ſaid, "Had I the univerſe, I would give it, to go with you; but I dare not do it againſt the will of God." This was evidently deluſion and derangement. The ſcriptures exhort us, on no account to forſake the aſſembling of ourſelves together. Bleſs God, that you have the capacity of obeying this exhortation.--- On every ground, the conſideration of his ſtate calls you to *thankfulneſs*; but above all, that you have any hope, however low and weak, of final deliverance, reſting upon that foundation which God has laid in the Goſpel. This alone renders the comforts of life truly ſweet, and makes even it's trials acceptable. It is that bleſſing which may be retained, and will be found ſufficient, when all others take their flight: but, like every mercy we enjoy, its full value is probably never felt till it is taken from us. Our late friend in his poem on Hope, thus addreſſes himſelf to that unſpeakable gift and work of God.

"Hope! let the wretch once conſcious of the joy,
Whom now deſpairing agonies deſtroy,
Speak, — for he can, and none ſo well as he,
What treaſures centre, what delights in thee!
Had he the gems, the ſpices, and the land
That boaſts the treaſure, all at his command;
The fragrant grove, th' ineſtimable mine,
Were light—when weigh'd againſt one ſmile of thine."

Have you this hope in lively exerciſe? Then you cannot but be thankful and joyful. Are you mourning its feebleneſs? Bleſs the God of all grace, for what you have; and claſp it to your heart

heart, determined in the ſtrength which Chriſt imparts, never to reſign it to the world or Satan. The way to preſerve what you have, is to be thankful. Every day, every hour of reaſon and of peace, every glimmering ray of hope and comfort, is enhanced in its value, by a ſerious reflection upon the diſtreſſes which our dear friend ſo long endured. Can you find relief from the ſorrows of the day in tranquil repoſe? Be increaſingly thankful from the recollection of what wearifome nights were appointed to him. Innumerable times was he conſtrained to cry out, "Would God it were morning!" Never ſurely in the lips of a fellow creature, could that exclamation be more appropriate, "Behold, and ſee, if there be any ſorrow like unto my ſorrow!"

But amidſt ſo numerous a congregation as that aſſembled on the preſent occaſion, I fear I am addreſſing ſome whoſe caſe is preciſely the reverſe of Mr. Cowper's. He had reaſon to rejoice in hope, though he was deaf to the voice of conſolation. Are there none of you who have cauſe to tremble, as Felix did, at the proſpect of eternal judgement, who yet have hitherto been deaf to alarm and admonition? You can tranſact your buſineſs, enjoy your comforts and amuſements, nay indulge in ſinful practices and purſuits; as if there was neither heaven nor hell, as if the word of God had not declared, that except you repent and be converted you muſt periſh for ever. Far better was it for our deceaſed neighbour, through ſo great tribulation to enter into Glory, than for you, with ſtupidity and hardneſs of heart, to haſten every moment toward everlaſting perdition. Why ſhould you be more at

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eaſe than he was; or why ſo much as he? If the mere thought of damnation, was ſuch a terror to his mind, what ſhould the actual approach of it be to yours? As yet, the long ſuffering of God has been wonderfully extended to you. May you improve it to your Salvation; leſt there be indeed nothing left for you, but a fearful looking for of judgement, and fiery indignation, which ſhall devour the adverſaries of God! Your privileges in this town are great. To whatever place of worſhip you go, the law of God is preached to you in it's ſpirituality, the Goſpel of Chriſt in it's freedom and fulneſs of Grace. Your future miſery will be dreadfully aggravated by theſe mercies, if you hearken not to the gracious exhortation with which the prophet introduces the words of our Text; "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found; call ye upon him while he is near. Let the wicked forſake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."

While every individual, in every ſituation, is loudly called to gratitude and praiſe by the ſubject before us, it no leſs clearly points out the neceſſity of UNCEASING PRAYER. The duty of thus acknowledging the Lord in all our ways, is eaſy to be demonſtrated. The privilege of caſting all our care on Him who careth for us, is ineſtimable. The methods in which our Lord and his diſciples inforce the univerſal and continual practice of prayer, are various, numerous and ſtriking. In tracing back the Lord's conduct toward us during our paſt lives, we may derive from every part of it

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powerful motives to "pray without ceaſing." But nothing may tend more forcibly to impreſs the mind with the importance of perſeverance in prayer, than a ſerious obſervation of our late friend's experience. Thoſe of you who know what it is to pray with the ſpirit and with the underſtanding, need not to be informed of the difficulties that occur in fulfilling our Lord's injunction, "to pray always, and never to faint." The delay of anſwers to your requeſts, the occaſional depreſſion of your minds, the violence of temptation, the prevalence of unbelief, the burden and perplexity of your outward or inward diſtreſſes, your inſenſibility toward inviſible though eternal objects, and your conviction of the paſt abuſe of mercy, concur to induce you at times to reſtrain prayer before God. When diſtreſſes have forced you to the throne of Grace, you have indeed found that acceſs to it which our atoning high prieſt has opened with his own blood, an unſpeakable and invaluable relief: and when your affections have been ſtrongly impreſſed with ſpiritual and divine objects, prayer has been not only eaſy but delightful. Frequently however, perhaps commonly, it has been the reverſe; and ſhame or deſpondency has led you at times to conclude, that it would be better for you, or at leaſt it could not be worſe, if you ceaſed to call upon God. How fatal to many, how pernicious to all, is ſuch a deluſion! How dreadful were its effects upon our lamented friend! I cannot apprehend, that it would have been poſſible for him to have languiſhed ſo many years in mental miſery, and to have died without the reſtoration of ſpiritual comfort, if the devices of Satan had not deterred him from prayer. God has promiſed every bleſſing

in anſwer to our requeſts, but none without them. While prayer is kept up, however feebly, there is hope for the future; as while the body breathes, there may be continuance and reſtoration. A perſon, well known to ſome of you, and well acquainted with the ſtate of our deceaſed neighbour, whoſe experience ſomewhat reſembled her's, once told me, that ſhe believed nothing would have induced her to perſiſt in waiting upon God, but the ſtate in which Mr. Cowper remained after ceaſing to do ſo. At that time his cup of affliction was not nearly filled. Are you able to drink it to the dregs? Are you willing to endure unutterable deſpair to the end of life? If not, "Pray without ceaſing!" Pray at the worſt of times! Surely it will augment the joys of our departed friend in a ſtate of Glory, to know that the example of his paſt miſeries prompts you to perſeverance in prayer.

Another leſſon of the utmoſt poſſible importance, is to be deduced from this intereſting ſubject—TO ADHERE TO THE REVEALED WORD OF GOD, *as your ground of hope and rule of conduct.* This is the ſtandard by which alone we have to try our ſentiments, our feelings, and our actions; but alas, how defective is the uſe we make of this invaluable gift! Who is there that does not diſcover a diſpoſition to leave out a part of God's word, rather than diſcard ſuch habits of opinion, experience, or practice, as cannot be reconciled to this unerring guide? Some there are, who while they profeſs to believe the ſcriptures, renounce the blood of Chriſt as the ground of pardon, and the work of the Eternal Spirit as the ſource of holineſs. While they ſubvert the foundation, others unhappily demoliſh the

ſuperſtructure of Chriſtianity. Speculating upon the ſecret decrees of eternal Wiſdom, which belong to God alone, they reject both the injunctions of the Law and the invitations of the Goſpel, which he has vouchſafed to divulge for our profit. Without theſe means, which the Lord has provided and preſcribed for the healing of the nations, what can ſinners do but wax worſe and worſe, till the meaſure of their iniquity is completed? While you guard againſt errors ſo deſtructive in their tendency, remember that in whatever manner you decline from the revealed will of God as your ſupport and guide through life, and whatever you may ſubſtitute in it's ſtead; it muſt in it's degree be detrimental to your ſpiritual welfare. The ſnare of which I apprehend you are chiefly in danger, is the ſame which the experience of our deceaſed friend moſt ſolemnly warns us againſt; that of adopting your *religious feelings* as your ground of hope and rule of conduct. To this temptation, the conſtitution and habit of Mr. Cowper's mind peculiarly expoſed him; but in a greater or ſmaller meaſure it is common to pious people, and I doubt not it has been ſeverely felt by ſome of you. They who are liable to have their minds the moſt ſenſibly affected with religious impreſſions, ſhould the more carefully guard againſt ſubſtituting them in the place of God's revealed word. Our lamented friend had long and eminently enjoyed the love of Chriſt ſhed abroad in his heart. His ſpiritual triumph and rejoicing had been unuſually great. His diſtreſs and terror, that ſucceeded theſe enjoyments, were proportionably aggravated. So deplorable an alteration in himſelf, led him to ſuppoſe that an equal change had taken place in the

mind of God; and that, after having admitted him to a foretaſte of heaven, he had doomed him to endleſs miſery. Alas, how had he forgotten the delightful theme of his brighter hours!

" There is a fountain fill'd with blood
Drawn from Emmanuel's veins;
And ſinners plung'd beneath that flood,
Loſe all their guilty ſtains.
Dear dying Lamb, thy precious blood
Shall never loſe its pow'r;
Till all the ranſom'd church of God
Be ſav'd, to ſin no more."

Ought we to conclude, when we loſe our comforts, that Chriſt has therefore loſt his power to ſave? Was it for *theſe*, that we were accepted of God? If not, why muſt we be rejected when they are removed? " Chriſt is able to ſave to the uttermoſt all who come to God by him, ſeeing he ever liveth to make interceſſion for them. He is the ſame, yeſterday, to day, and for ever. Him that cometh unto him, He will in no wiſe caſt out." When, therefore, you can derive neither comfort nor hope from your preſent feelings, and when all paſt enjoyment only enhances your preſent diſtreſs, recollect that the promiſes of God in Chriſt can ſuffer no change; that his power and grace are ſuſceptible of no decay; that to be deterred by your changeable feelings from ſeeking and truſting in Chriſt, is to place them in the room of his revealed word; and that it was time for the Lord to withdraw your religious comfort, when you were reſting on *that*, inſtead of his infallible promiſe. " You would but ill have enjoyed," ſays a ſenſible foreign writer, " that which you knew not how to part with."

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The ſtrange perſuaſion, which I have already ſaid our late friend entertained, that it was his duty to deprive himſelf of life, aroſe from this error, of ſubſtituting his feelings for the word of God. As I fear that ſimilar temptations may not be uncommon to minds whoſe natural melancholy affects their religious experience, I think it my duty to be explicit on this ſubject. I have argued with him on the impoſſibility that God ſhould command him to tranſgreſs his own law; and he ſupported his opinion by this plea, that the force with which the impreſſion of ſuch a duty had been made upon his mind, was equal to that of any he had received from the truths of Scripture. He alledged in his vindication, the example of Abraham, who heſitated not to put to death his beloved and only ſon, at the command of God; and judging himſelf called in like manner to perform an extraordinary act of faith, he concluded that his failure was therefore an unparallelled offence, beyond the reach of pardon. Beware leſt any of you miſapply the hiſtory of Abraham, through forgetfulneſs that you are under a diſpenſation very different from that of the patriarchal age. Before the Lord vouchſafed a written record of his will, he doubtleſs diſtinguiſhed with infallible certainty, the immediate revelations which he imparted to choſen perſons. However inconſiſtent the promiſe and the command that were given to Abraham muſt have appeared, he knew, beyond a poſſibility of doubt, that both came from God. But if *your* minds are at different times ſtrongly impreſſed with oppoſite purpoſes, how are you to diſtinguiſh that which is agreeable to the will of God? Doubtleſs, by referring all to the

ſtandard of his unerring and unchanging word. So the prophet Iſaiah directs, "to the law and the teſtimony: if they ſpeak not according to this word, it is becauſe there is no light in them." Thus try the ſpirits and the doctrines of preachers; "prove all things; hold faſt that which is good, and abſtain from that which appears to be evil." To this teſt, bring your religious feelings; looking to the ſure word of inſpiration, as to a light ſhining amidſt darkneſs. With this "ſword of the Spirit," oppoſe your ſpiritual enemies; replying to every ſuggeſtion of Satan, after our Lord's pattern, "It is written." Only thus, can *your* ways and thoughts be aſſimilated to the ways and thoughts of God.

I cannot cloſe this diſcourſe without remarking, that our time has been employed, and our attention engaged, on the preſent occaſion, in a very unuſual manner. Never before, from this pulpit, or from any in this town, have you probably heard ſo much ſpoken of a *fellow creature*. The circumſtances deſcribed, and the degree in which they have intereſted our minds, however remarkable, would not in my judgement vindicate the employment of an hour devoted to Chriſtian Worſhip, merely to contemplate the character of a mortal like ourſelves. But I truſt that our ſubject at this time, is eminently adapted to lead us to the LAMB OF GOD *that taketh away the ſin of the world*. Only through the efficacy of His precious blood to atone for guilt, did our late excellent neighbour ever cheriſh a hope of Salvation. Upon this ground alone, we build our confidence that he is now exalted to a ſtate of happineſs and glory. You have ſeen that a life of faith in Jeſus Chriſt, as able and willing to deliver you

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from all evil, is the only way of peace and joy upon earth. You have ſeen the danger of relying, in any meaſure, upon the comfort you have already enjoyed in his ſervice, inſtead of truſting in Him who is the inexhauſtible ſource of conſolation. You have ſeen an aſtoniſhing inſtance of the unchangeable love of Chriſt to his people, in the preſervation of our dear deceaſed friend, through trials more dreadful than the heated furnace of the Chaldean monarch; and in his peaceful diſmiſſion, after ſo many years of miſery, to a world " where ſorrow is unknown." We have heard the voice of our High-prieſt reprove the accuſer of his people; " The Lord that hath choſen Jeruſalem, rebuke thee! Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire? "

In touching upon ſome of the excellencies of our late amiable friend's diſpoſition and conduct, which endeared him, I believe without a ſingle exception, to every one who knew him, I have been often reminded of *Him* to whoſe image, all whom God foreknew as heirs of eternal life, He predeſtinated to be conformed. To avoid breaking the connexion, and increaſing the extent of this diſcourſe, which is at preſent greater than I wiſhed it to be, I have omitted to trace ſtep by ſtep, this pleaſing and profitable reſemblance. But I hope that you will ſupply this deficiency, by availing yourſelves of ſo blameleſs and beautiful a pattern, as that which you know was exhibited in our beloved neighbour, to enhance your admiration of that matchleſs excellence which ſhone forth in the human character of Jeſus; in compariſon with whom,

" All things below that charm our ſight
Are ſhadows, tipt with glow-worm light."

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The reſemblance of the brighteſt Chriſtian to his Lord and Saviour, can at the utmoſt riſe no higher than that of the moon's pale luſtre, to the dazzling ſplendour of the Sun, from which it's exiſtence is derived. "Whatſoever things are true, or venerable, or juſt, or pure, or lovely, or of good report, every virtue and every praiſe," have their perfection and their ſource in the Son of God; to imitate whom, and to receive out of his fullneſs, is the higheſt happineſs and honour of his diſciples. Others we are to follow, only as they follow Chriſt. But "thoſe things which ye have learned and received, and heard and ſeen," in our excellent neighbour, in which he cloſely copied the heavenly pattern, "think of, and practiſe thoſe things; and the God of peace ſhall be with you."

Your eyes have been ſuffuſed with tears, that expreſſed the ſympathy of your hearts with the peculiar ſufferings of our dear deceaſed friend. Have not theſe led you to recollect, and to be affected with the ſufferings of Jeſus? Like Job, our beloved neighbour ſuffered, not as a malefactor, nor an atrocious ſinner, but according to the will of God. His courſe, now finiſhed, affords indeed an important ſequel to the hiſtory of Job, as it demonſtrates that a believer may not only live, but alſo die under the preſſure of ſevere affliction. But both were juſtly liable to ſuffer, as partakers of the guilt and depravity from which none of the race of Adam is exempt. Jeſus alone ſuffered without ſin; not merely as an example, though as the brighteſt example of ſuffering meekneſs and patience; but as the only atonement that could be made for us. "He bore our ſins in his own body on the croſs;

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for our tranſgreſſions he was wounded, and bruiſed for our iniquities; the chaſtiſement of our peace was upon him, and with his ſtripes we are healed." That we may "run with patience the courſe that is before us," of trial and affliction, let us look unto Jeſus the author and finiſher of faith, who for the joy that was ſet before him, endured the croſs, diſregarding the ſhame."

Finally, remember, amidſt the difficulties and diſtreſſes that we may be called either ourſelves to ſuffer, or to ſee others endure, all is in the hand of Jeſus, as "the Mediator between God and men, who gave himſelf a ranſom for all." All power is committed to him, in heaven and on earth. Satan by haraſſing and tempting the diſciples of Chriſt, and the men of the world by reſiſting or perſecuting them, can only accompliſh the purpoſes, and advance the kingdom of our Redeemer. His ways and thoughts are above ours, certainly therefore above thoſe of our enemies, as the heavens are above the earth. Let it be our concern, to profit from the preſent meditation, by bringing our thoughts and our ways into a proper ſubjection and conformity to His. Let us "follow them who through faith and patience inherit the promiſes;" and ere long we ſhall join the heavenly choir, ſinging, "Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty! Juſt and true are thy ways, thou King of ſaints!"

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